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DAILY NEWS Food

The grapes of wrap: Presenting wine as a gift

Oeno-File

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Most wine drinkers in America can buy wine where they buy food. Supermarkets account for almost 25% of all wine sales, including restaurants, and states such as New York that prohibit wine sales in supermarkets are in a small minority. But our system has its advantages.

Service is one upside to mom-and-pop ownership; that's particularly valuable when you buy wine as a gift. Retailers who specialize in wine are happy to recommend unusual and interesting wines and many will assemble gift baskets as well.

Several other excellent wine shops are household names for wine lovers, because of their great selection and their dedication to offering good wine.

Recently, several sommeliers have turned into passionate retailers. **Le Du's Wines** (600 Washington St.) is owned by the former wine director of Restaurant Daniel. **Ralph's Wine & Spirits** in Rye is the new domain of Ralph Hersom, former wine director of Le Cirque 2000. And **Appellation Wine & Spirits** (156 10th Ave.) is owned by Scott Pactor, whose wine background included stints at Balthazar, Felidia and Michael's.

When you want to give a wine that's unusual, all of these wine merchants can help you find the right one. (I found a terrific **2004 Cahors by Gouleyant**, at Best Cellars for just \$10.50.) But shop early, before they become overrun with requests.

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